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The Black Cat

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Maison Vallotte
J. J. Meehan

Husband Martinez
George Saint-Amour

The Meeting
Clifford Howard

The Reapers
Batterman Lindsay

The Coming and Going of Slats
O. B. Seely

At the Bridge
James Francis Dwyer

The Old Piano
Elizabeth Ewing

A Subtle Retreat
Elizabeth Lambert Wood

Ten Cents

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The Black Cat

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Maison Vallotte.*

BY J. J. MEEHAN.

EST you might think that the Maison Vallotte is situated in a French country, as its name seems to imply, I hasten to say that it is not. The Maison, or Hotel Vallotte, is located in a little town back from the Maine Coast, charming in the summer, and autumn, and not unpleasant in the winter season. Monsieur Vallotte descends from one of the old French families that was Acadian in its American origin. It is not out of the order to find them in Maine. They have been there for centuries; some of them have risen to high place in the council of the state and the nation. Monsieur Vallotte is wealthy. He has traveled. He knows London and Paris. He has lived in Rome and Cairo. Stockholm and St. Petersburg are not strange to him; and he has visited the Orient. He entertained with open house and open heart, before the death of his wife. He counted his friends among the brilliant spirits of Europe and America. A Scotch professor or a German musician might be found at his table d'hote. Or it might be a coffee planter from Brazil, or a sugar planter from Cuba. A roving disciple of Brahma followed the path of a Japanese officer; and a cultured Creole slept in the chamber that had been vacated by a banker from Melbourne. Rare wines and famous cigars added comfort

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to life at the Vallotte; and a guest was a guest by invitation only. The departure of Madame Vallotte changed the manner, but not the quality, of entertainment of the Maison. Monsieur Vallotte went to Egypt, leaving the house in charge of a colored servitor, who had grown rich, wise and discreet under the roof of his master. A year passed and Monsieur Vallotte did not return. He was living in Calcutta, he wrote, and his health was not of the best.

Friends came from New York during the summer. The host was missed; but his colored captain represented him, and the reputation of the house was honorably sustained. It was after dinner one evening, late in September, that the guests were asked to assemble in the private parlor of M. Vallotte. A dozen gentlemen answered the summons. Following them came the dark caretaker of the mansion. "I am Mr. Jackson," he said, taking his place at a table that had been arranged for a presiding officer. "The respected owner of this house writes me that the time of his return is indefinite. He leaves the management of his property in my hands. I cannot shut his door against the many gentlemen who have honored his house with their presence in past years. I cannot bring myself to draw upon him for the expense of a property that ought to sustain itself. I have thought of conducting the Maison as a private hotel. The present standard of service can be retained; and the rate can be made high enough to bar any patronage that might be unwelcome. It will not be necessary to call public attention to this change, and I think the selection of guests may be left with me. Gentlemen, may I have your will in this matter? The furtherance of this proposition rests with you." There was no dissenting voice in the answer. And thus it happened that the Maison Vallotte was sometimes called Hotel Vallotte.

It was the shooting season, a little later, that brought me to the Hotel. A note from a Virginia senator introduced me to Mr. Jackson. I sought, the message ran, a few weeks of rest and seclusion.

One of the peculiarities of the Maison was the manner of numbering the rooms.

The house was large and comfortable, with bed chambers on

the second and third floors. Roman letters were displayed on the doors, instead of the figures of the familiar Arabic notation. Indeed, it is to the Romans that I charge the events that followed in the Hotel Vallotte. My room was XLIII. I remember that. It contained two beds, and had been intended for two members of the same family, or for two friends who might be traveling together. It was late when I retired, conducted by a sable henchman who bowed and wished me a good night. A single candle on the bureau gave light for one of the beds on the right-hand side of the entering door. I was too weary to make a tour of the large room; therefore I turned down the cover of my bed, blew out my candle and sought the land of dreams.

I slept perhaps two hours when I awoke with a feeling of thirst. I could find no drinking water in the room, and I was about to ring my bell when I remembered that I had seen a silver pitcher and glasses on a small table at the end of my corridor. My candle stood, relighted on the bureau, and taking it in my hand I walked quietly into the corridor. I found a refreshing drink, wherefore I filled a goblet and started for my chamber. I had taken a dozen steps, when my candle suddenly flickered and went out. It did not matter much, as there was a gray twilight from a large window at the end of the corridor. When I got to my door I took the trouble to run my fingers over the Roman letters. I placed my candlestick on the top of my goblet and counted, one by one. There was the X and the L, and the three I's. I pushed the door in, deposited my goblet and candlestick on the bureau, and returned to my bed. I was going into a sound sleep when I became conscious of a light in the room. Starting up hastily, I saw my candle burning brightly; and there, in the other bed, was something or some one looking at me.

"I pray you not to alarm yourself," said a man's voice. "You have mistakenly entered the wrong room. My number is XLIIII, but I noticed yesterday that the last I had dropped, and was hanging downward, held only by the lower fastening. It was an idea of my friend Vallotte to use the Roman letters, copying even the clock-face arrangement of the four I's. Then I frequently begin my sleep in the right-hand bed. That accounts for the fact that you found the bed covers lying much as you had left

your own couch. There are only two rooms in the house, containing two beds — this one, and the next one farther along in the corridor. I pray you not to disturb yourself."

I was not disturbed; neither was I alarmed. I was amused. I ought to have made an apology and gone to my own room. I did neither. Something in the tone of my neighbor's voice had caused me to think that I was not unwelcome. I began to look about the room. At his side of the apartment there was the trunk and bag of the ordinary traveler. Above these, along the wall were two shelves, one over the other. On these shelves stood two long rows of hat-boxes. There was an easel in the corner, and there was a campstool. There were brushes, pigments and a palette. Mounted on the easel was a plaster head of a wild animal. The head was partly painted with the colors which the original beast may have worn, and two ferocious glass eyes shone from two yellow sockets. High on the wall, near the ceiling, hung a dozen or fifteen painted plaster heads of different animals; and out of each head glared a pair of flashing eyes. Laughing softly to myself, I sank back into the bed. The situation was so ludicrous that I hardly knew how to bow myself out of it. And the hat-boxes!

I saw it all now. The idea of a man traveling about with a plaster menagerie packed in hat-boxes! I looked at the image that hung above the headboard of his bed and my mind rapidly framed a sign from a museum. It read,

TIGER. HAB. INDIA.

Then I mentally painted and hung on my neighbor another sign which read,

HOMO. HAB. UTOPIA.

I wanted to excuse myself and to go, but I did not know how to do it gracefully. My neighbor now broke in upon my trance.

"You are young and very healthy," he said. "Otherwise you could not have sat there in the cold. Plainly you are interested in my collection of animal heads. Perhaps they excite you to merriment. If so your attitude will change when you come to know their history."

Once again the strange, pathetic tone of my neighbor's voice aroused me.

"It was stupid on my part to enter this room," I said, "and it was thoughtless to remain here after I had discovered my mistake. I will withdraw if you wish; or if my companionship is not distasteful I will listen to your story of the animals."

"You ought to cover yourself in bed first," said my friend. "Surely you are cold by this time."

Truly, I was cold. I arranged myself comfortably.

"A good many years ago," he continued, "I was spending a few days in Paris in company with some American travelers. We stopped to rest at a suburban inn one afternoon, where our amusement was enhanced by the tales of an old woman who told our fortunes. She predicted many things, and none that were direfully unpleasant.

"But," I asked at the end, "how will we die?"

"I speak not of death," she answered solemnly.

"But," I persisted, "tell us the manner of our death."

Quickly she replied. "Two by water, two by disease and one — and one will be killed by a wild animal!"

"Heedless of her words we soon parted, each going his own way. Ten years later I read of the death of two of our group. They were brothers. They perished in a mountain torrent, in Canada. The stage in which they were riding was driven off a bridge; and they died struggling in the water and darkness. Another died of natural causes. He was buried in New York. I attended the last services that were held for him. The fourth member of the Paris company was a lady. Her grave is in California where she was stricken with mountain fever. Her end came five years ago. I am the fifth and last of the little band. I am an old man. Do you wonder that I surround myself with reminders of my coming doom?"

"But your fate," I answered, "is to come in such an unusual way that it is hardly to be thought of by a sane man. It is too absurdly improbable."

"I am not so sure of that," said my friend.

"I was spending a few days in a manufacturing town in Ohio, about four years ago. Circus posters were displayed on the dead

walls about the village. I had sufficient warning in regard to the wild animals. I arranged to leave the town one day before the arrival of the circus. An accident delayed my train, and I was obliged to remain that night. Before dusk the advance guard of the circus was upon the town. A street parade was soon formed. Keeping discreetly within the four walls of my own room, I rested until the animals had passed my hotel. Nearly two hours later I ventured to walk down a quiet street, to enjoy for a few moments the pleasant air of the evening. I was standing beneath one of the ancestral trees of the village, when I felt a stern hand upon my shoulder. Turning in dread I saw above me the huge outline of a mighty elephant. Strange words in an unknown tongue fell upon my hearing, as I sank helpless beneath the tree. The brute and his Asiatic keeper were led away by a man who seemed to be in authority. He told me that the beast was entirely harmless, and was attached to the circus to amuse babies and children. He tried to give me a couple of tickets for the entertainment, but I refused them with thanks from the depths of my heart.

"Later I was annoyed by a small Arctic bear. It was at an ice carnival, in Montreal. I had a lead of fifteen feet in a skating race for charity. I had been a good skater in my youth; and I was overjoyed to think that my ever impending fate had not marred my glacial prowess. I could hear the applause of the crowd on every side of me. Suddenly, and without warning, a small white bear darted across my track. One instant brought the French woman's prophecy; the next brought the crash. The bear went down and I fell upon him. We rolled over and over, amid the jeers of the spectators. Scratched and bleeding, I broke away from him. A bystander pulled his head off, and beneath his white fur was the body of a handsome young man. A pair of skates were strapped to his feet. He was unconscious, but he recovered in a little while. Nevertheless, I left the city without knowing how the race was decided."

"But," I suggested, "those were perfectly natural accidents."

"Perhaps so," he answered. "You may remember the explosion of the yacht *Haydee,* in the Mediterranean, off Marseilles. It was there that I lost my first collection of heads. A wood

carver in Rotterdam made them for me; and I painted them myself. They were made in sizes fit to be carried in my hat-boxes. I had them arranged in my cabin on the *Haydee*. The rays of early sunrise were just breaking through a bank of fog, when the yacht's boiler blew up, without an instant's warning. I was struggling in the water before I knew it. My cabin window was closed, and I was quickly carried off my feet by the rush of the waves. Coming to the surface I found myself surrounded by an array of tigers, panthers, wild boars and other man-killing animals. I tried to break the window, but every movement brought a reinforcement of the wooden beasts. A lion glared at me from one side; a puma menaced me in front. The beasts climbed and jostled each other to reach me. Frantic with despair I made a last, wild effort to shout. The end had come. A torrent of water poured into my throat. My eyes grew dim. The gathered beasts turned their heads toward me and opened their mouths. They gave one maddening roar of triumph, and I passed away.

"The safe roof of a hospital in Marseilles was my shelter when my mind came back. My companions on the yacht had been rescued. They came to see me and spoke words of sympathy. But I spent many weeks in a French sanitarium before I regained control of my nerves."

It was now the near hour of morning. Little rumbles of thunder sounded in the distance, and short, sharp flashes of lightning penetrated the heavy blinds and curtains of the apartment. They showed me my poor old friend lying with closed eyes on his pillow across the room. He seemed to be asleep. This was my opportunity. I could go softly to my own room, and I could seek him again at the breakfast hour. I gathered my candlestick and goblet. My hand was on the knob of the door. A low hum of thunder was drowning the slight noise of my movements, when a blinding flash crossed my eyes. There was a sound of something breaking on the roof, and I knew that the house had been struck by lightning. Dazed and trembling, I knew not which way to move. I opened the door of the room. Servants were hurrying about, with lighted lamps.

"Is any one hurt?" asked Mr. Jackson, entering the room. I

looked toward the further bed. There, standing on the floor was my poor old friend, the rightful tenant of the chamber. His white hair was disarrayed, and blood streamed from his forehead and neck. His nightdress was stained and soaked. Bits of plaster were clinging in his hair. A plaster bear was at his feet. Glass eyes and pieces of plaster littered his bed. I looked at the ceiling and the truth dawned upon me. The head of the great tiger above his couch had fallen upon him.

We placed him on the other bed. A gruff, country doctor soon arrived.

"Merely a few scalp wounds," he said. "Take him into another room and then bury those infernal animals. The sight of them may bring on delirium when he regains consciousness."

I had him carried to my own room. I commanded Jackson to bear away the animals and the hat-boxes. My poor, fated friend was better by nightfall, and I was thinking of what I might do for him when a telegram summoned me post haste to New York. A banking house, in which I was directly interested, had made what the telegram called a "bad failure." I did not leave him, however, without a promise to return as soon as possible; and he gave me his card, on which was inscribed the name, "A. Morris."

It was three weeks before I could think of leaving New York. Meanwhile I wrote to Mr. Morris. There was no response, whereupon I wrote to Jackson. He replied that M. Vallotte had cabled to Mr. Morris, and the latter had boarded a yacht at Halifax, bound for the coast of France. Jackson added that the season was ended at the Maison. He expected no visitors before spring.

At the Christmas reunion of our family I related to my favorite aunt the history of Mr. Morris.

"How like your dead father's cousin!" she said. "He has been traveling all his life with his head full of strange fancies. We have not heard from him in ten years. But his name was Arthur Morrison."

The likeness in the name attracted me. I wrote Jackson to advise me of the return of Mr. Morris or M. Vallotte. It was June when they came back to the Maison. I went in July. I had a theory, which, in my belief, would cure Mr. Morris of his absurd fondness for wild animals.

"You have never been sure," I said to him one day, about the death of the lady who made one of your party in Paris."

"Mrs. Wayne died of mountain fever, as nearly as I could learn," he answered.

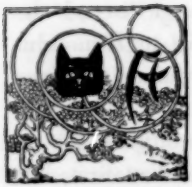
I prevailed on him to give me the facts in her case. Beyond the certainty that she had lived in San Francisco, there was little to be discovered. This was something, however. I turned the tale over to my nephew, who was planning a trip to Honolulu. He found a medical friend in California, and the matter was placed in his hands. The end of it was, we learned, that Mrs. Wayne had been ordered to the mountains on account of an attack of pleurisy. The higher altitude was beneficial at first, but a slight attack of fever made it necessary to seek a lower level. She was traveling by coach through the lonely mountains, when a small panther, harassed by hunters, was shot before her eyes. The fleeing animal leaped high in the air at the fusilade, and fell back to the ground, dead. Perhaps Mrs. Wayne had carried in her memory the early prophecy of the fortune teller. Perhaps she believed that she, too, would be killed by a wild animal. It is not quite beyond the bounds of belief that two persons, a man and a woman, could travel different ways with the same strange idea of fate swinging before their eyes. Mrs. Wayne fainted at the sight of the bleeding, struggling beast. She suffered a nervous shock. She did not live to get back to San Francisco.

Arthur Morrison knows all this now. He lives near us, in New York, and we will never allow him to return to the lonely existence which oppressed him for so many years. He is almost convinced that Mrs. Wayne's death fulfilled the fortune teller's prophecy.

Still, as I sit on his favorite seat near the Mall, in Central Park, I feel that his eye always seeks the little hill that flanks the south end of the lake. And there, on a pedestal, stands the bronze lioness by Cain, with her prey trailing from her mouth, and two little cubs springing at her feet.

Husband Martinez.*

BY GEORGE SAINT-AMOUR.



LONE lobô wolf, an Old Man, gray and gaunt, skulking behind a lechuguilla bush, with the hungry smell of antelope in his nostrils—bound perhaps for Sierra Blanca—saw the clopers in the early morning.

The little woman, pretty, dark skinned, black haired, sat across the bare back of a bronco mare. To steady herself she had twisted her fingers in the mare's mane. Big, handsome, broad shouldered, the young man swinging along at the mare's side was talking with the woman when the lobo wolf first espied them. On the other side of the bronco mare was her black colt, fastened to his mother by a short lariat.

Romulus, a brindle bulldog, led the party. He limped painfully, but bravely maintained his position as leader. Every few minutes he looked back, and if the colt were not following closely, quietly, as he should, Romulus growled so savagely that the colt rushed closer to his mother's side for protection.

The sand was already becoming re-heated by the fierce June sun, yet the man and the woman appeared quite cheerful. Occasionally the man laid his hand on the woman's arm, and she smiled her love and gratitude for the little attention.

Two holsters hung from a belt around the man's waist. The wolf suspected that each holster held a 45-calibre revolver. Also the wolf judged that the big man could demonstrate good marksmanship if occasion demanded, and the wolf judged well.

By exercising extreme caution the lobo could keep track of the party of strangers. Sotol and ocatilla bushes, lechuguilla bushes, mesquite and cacti were quite plentiful to the east, and if he were careful to scurry from one to the other, he could see where they were going without himself being seen. The dog and the man

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would naturally avoid the thorns of prairie vegetation, wolf instinct told him.

Once or twice the mare tossed her head and snorted uneasily, but Jackson each time insisted that she was foolish, unnecessarily agitated. "Why, gal, there's nothing around here — not another living thing besides us and a few scorpions and 'tarans,' maybe," he'd say to the mare, with a smile at the woman.

Early in the morning Romulus once stopped short in his tracks and growled. His nostrils quivered, and after a moment's hesitancy he rushed pell-mell in the direction of a clump of sotol. But he found nothing. It was only the scent of some animal that had been there previously.

Before noontime the skin began to peel a little from Nannette's pretty, retroussé nose, and she laughed as Jackson kissed it while she leaned from the bronco. Then she demanded the privilege of walking beside him, and for a time they trudged along hand in hand, as happy as two children, even though they had miles and miles of dry, hot, dreary prairie ahead of them.

Jackson was telling Nannette how angry the people on "TO" ranch would be when they discovered that the mare and colt had disappeared. Earlier in the day he noticed the brand on the bronco, and was maliciously pleased at seeing it, for the "TO" ranch people and husband José Martinez were very friendly. They helped make and unmake governors and other state officials in Chihuahua. The sun was almost unbearable, but the man and woman plodded steadily onward, sinking an inch or so in the sand at each footstep. Jackson and Nannette cheered each other with conversation, and by kindly pats on the neck and shoulders of the mare and colt kept their courage at high tide.

Romulus suddenly stopped. The bulldog lifted one foot from the hot sand and holding it there, whined dismally. Then of all things, dignified Romulus attempted a stunt and was successful, little as he was given to performing tricks. He "sat up," thus lifting both front feet from the burning desert. Jackson looked at the dog in wonder. Then the dog tumbled over on his back and Jackson rushed forward to see what the trouble was. Lying with his four feet in the air, Romulus, the brave, plucky, nervy bulldog, was whining, crying like a child. Immediately Nannette slipped

from her mount and hurried to learn what was happening. Her woman's instinct served better than the man's prairie knowledge, for it was she who discovered that Romulus had quit — for the first time in his life — because his feet were too sore for him to go farther.

"Pauvre chien," she said, dropping to the sand beside him and taking him in her lap. "Poor, poor doggie." Romulus affectionately licked her peeled nose. Nannette tore a strip of cloth from her skirt, and with merry little laughs and many commiserating remarks intended to heal the injured dignity of Romulus, made him four "shoes." When these were tied on his feet the dog at first looked insulted and disheartened at his predicament, but upon taking a few steps and finding that it went pretty well, he once again took the lead.

The wolf, crouched behind a sand dune, looked his surprise at the three wolves which had at that moment strangely enough joined him. The scene was beyond understanding. As was the fact, also, that a party of lobos had united forces with him in the chase — when all knew that it was customary for each animal to work separately.

A coyote, curious, and it might be, scenting a chance to steal, ventured too close to the travelers, and there was the report of a heavy revolver, a puff of smoke near Jackson, and the coyote quietly keeled over. Romulus rushed to his prostrate hereditary enemy, and shook the dead coyote until the cowpuncher called him off, saying: "Save your strength, old boy. The sun's too hot to work so hard."

The grizzly leader of the lobos started to trot farther away from the vicinity, and the others followed, wisely concluding that a gray, shaggy-headed lobo knew more than young lobos.

A sand storm came up, and Jackson told Nannette to dismount and stand in the shelter of the bronco mare and colt, who huddled themselves with their heads pointed away from the storm, as nature told them to do. Jackson stood beside Nannette, his broad back to the piercing sand, with Romulus in his arms, sheltering the bulldog as best he could.

After the sand storm, which was light and of short duration, Jackson laughed at Nannette's dejection because the storm had

wreaked its dirty vengeance upon the chic suit she had originally brought from Paris.

"You laugh, M'sieu Georges," Nannette said in her precise English, "but you are not pleased. I am not now 'pretty Nannette,' but 'dirty Nannette.' It is in my mouth, my hair, my eyes, my clothes, the sand, and it is not nice at all. Just see me!" she exclaimed, holding out her arms to him with an appealing gesture, to which he replied by folding her in a bear embrace. "You are always dear Nannette to me, anyhow," the big cowpuncher said to her.

Again they resumed their weary, hot way toward Sierra Blanca. The sand storm over, not even the suggestion of a breeze stirred to help them bear the oppressive glare of the sun as it was beaten back into their faces by the white sand. Nannette's lips became dry and parched, and Jackson had to continually warn her against using too much of the water he carried in an olla. To merely moisten her lips and rinse her mouth, she could not believe, was better than to pour it down her throat. But it was unalterably true, and she followed the man's instructions, much as she rebelled at thus tantalizing her thirst. The bronco mare's head drooped low, even though she was well inured to the heat of the plains. She plodded along patiently, however, occasionally nosing the colt tied to her neck, and showed the bronco toughness that was in her by never a falter or hesitancy at continuing the step by step progress toward the destination her captor had chosen for her. And Romulus, sturdy, gritty Romulus! Like his kind he stuck. Straight on and on, once in awhile turning to see if the others, humans and horses, were following.

The four wolves, unseen, unsuspected by the pilgrims, scurried from bush to bush, from sand dune to sand dune, at a distance, following the Old Man. He never became over-anxious, excited. But this party looked strange to him — they were different from anything he had ever seen.

Night was approaching, Jackson learned by consulting his watch, and he heaved a sigh of thanks. He could see clear and straight behind them for miles. From each rise of drifted sand he took a careful look in the direction of the Rio Grande. There were no pursuers in sight. Perhaps Martinez' men had gone westward,

expecting to locate them in Lower California. He hoped so. He was very, very tired, and he did so long to lie down in the cool of the evening and rest. Nannette, too! She must be what cowboys term "all in," but she never whimpered — and Jackson's big heart swelled with love as he looked at her seated on the mare. Her dark little face was wreathed in smiles, and she looked all pleasant anticipation. She was thinking of him, he surmised.

Unexpectedly Jackson stopped stock still in his tracks, and, using both hands to shield his eyes from the desert glare, looked across the sand to one side. Nannette, too, looked, but all she could make out was a little black heap on the white background.

"I b'lieve it's a burned-out camp fire," said Jackson quietly. He turned sharply to the northward and the others followed. Romulus dropped back to a position beside his master now. Failing to understand, he could not lead.

The wolves hurried away, skulking, bellies close to the ground, for the man was heading straight towards them, and it was yet daylight.

Behind a clump of lechuguilla that had a heap of sand blown and piled against it, making it a good hiding place, the shaggy-headed lobo took his stand, a good half mile from the little heap of partly burned wood and roots. He knew all about the camp fire. He had seen three men sitting about it a few evenings since while they cooked black coffee and fried bacon, and afterwards as they smoked and talked. Yes, he knew all about the little black spot on the white desert which had attracted the cowpuncher's attention. And after having followed the travelers all day, he could have foretold that Nannette would slip off the bronco mare, stiff and lame, into Jackson's arms. It might be that the wolf did not understand why one human being should be so kind and careful of another human being — he had never seen that before — but had he not seen the big one thus several times tenderly treat the little one who wore the queer clothes? Of course Old Man understood Jackson's every action when the cowpuncher dug for a mesquite root and tied the mare stolen from the "TO" ranch to it, and why the colt was left untied; a suckling colt will not leave his mother if he can help it on the prairie. Romulus? He had seen such creatures about ranch houses, but never before out on the plains miles and miles

from a human habitation. Romulus looked aggressive, too, and Old Man did not like him. However, Romulus was only one.

The smell of boiling coffee and cooking meat finally came to the keen nostrils of the four wolves, and Old Man had trouble preventing them from betraying their presence, so anxious and excited did they become. Young wolves are so impetuous. Every little while the small person went to the big person and the two would stand with their arms about each other.

After having eaten, though, these people acted like other people. They pushed up the few remaining sticks of their fire to make it last long as possible, and the big person rolled a cigarette and smoked. The wolves had come closer and could better see what was happening.

Later on, the big person opened the bundle he had carried all day. From it he took some blankets. One of these he laid on the sand, with one end rolled to make a head rest. He spoke a few words to the small person and the small one lay down on the blanket the big one prepared. Then the one who was smoking a cigarette took a second blanket and covered the one lying down. He seemed very careful to tuck it in everywhere.

The pretty, white, small, harmless-looking niña del tierra — child of the earth — although extremely rare, was sometimes found in this locality. To be bitten by the insect with the Mexican name was sure, quick death. The cowpuncher looked well about him, half fearful lest his eyes should light upon the small insect which had a head exactly resembling that of a new-born human infant, but saw none.

With a final keen glance at the sand about him, the big man removed his sombrero, and leaning over the person lying on the blanket, in the dim light of the stars and the camp fire, kissed the recumbent one. A pair of prettily rounded arms stole around his neck, and held him motionless for an instant. With a smile on his sun-tanned face, the one on his knees again kissed the other, and then went to the other side of the fire, where he rolled himself in a blanket and was soon motionless in sleep. His great chest heaved and relaxed, but otherwise he did not stir a muscle.

The wolves saw all this. They also saw Romulus on guard. Several times the bulldog walked around the fire, and then he'd

go to the staked mare and see if she was all right. The two had become better acquainted now, and the mare would stop munching at the bushes near her to playfully shove the bulldog with her nose. Romulus seemed to like this. He neither growled nor showed his vicious teeth. Instead, he wagged his stump of a tail, and might have sacrificed his dignity to the extent of jumping and gambolling, had he not been so tired and footsore.

Thinking he saw two bright spots, lights perhaps, living, shining eyes possibly, in the semi-darkness, the bulldog rushed a hundred feet from the fire to learn what it was, but he discovered nothing alarming. He smelled the ground suspiciously, however, and sat down by himself in the half-light, alone, unafraid, yet worried, to ponder the situation. The wolves hurried back away from the too close proximity to the camp. They did not especially fear Romulus, but it was too soon to precipitate trouble.

The bulldog walked back to Nannette's side. He would have much preferred to remain alongside Jackson, but for some unaccountable reason Nannette was the person who required the most attention.

"Mon cher Georges, mon cher Georges," murmured in a sleepy voice, caused Romulus to prick up his cropped ears and sit very straight, alert, on the sand.

On the other side of the fire the big man was muttering in his sleep: "Wonder what the boys'll say? Wonder if they'll blame me much for taking Nannette away from old Martinez. He bought her, d—m him, bought her, practically, from her father, in spite of her objections." The big man angrily tossed his arms and settled into sounder sleep.

It was now so quiet and peaceful that the mare slept standing, the colt lying close to her. And Romulus, on watch, dozed too. Dropping his nose on his paws, facing the weird prairie, he closed his eyes and rested his tired body. His feet pained him so much that sleep was almost impossible for him, but it was a sort of rest, anyway.

Old Man crept to within a hundred yards of the camp. His three companions lingered in the rear — as they must when stealth was necessary. The old lobo reconnoitered for a moment, but the bulldog stirred uneasily, and Old Man returned into the gloom,

crouched so low, crawling, creeping, that he showed scarce ten inches above the sand.

A light breeze stirred the leaves of a cactus behind which the old lobo was hiding, and immediately he started to lope swiftly away, the three young wolves following him. At the very first waft of wind the bronco mare lifted her head and snorted. The light wind blew from the wolves to the camp, and the wolf knew at once that the camp must be approached from another direction. Even the black colt came to his feet with a jump when the wolf scent reached him.

Making a wide détour the wolves halted a full mile from the sleeping Jackson and Nannette. It was well to give the bulldog and mare and colt plenty of time to lull themselves into a false sense of security.

Romulus, dreaming of coyotes chased and captured, slept on and on. Although aching and paining, his feet were at last forgotten. The mare stretched herself on the sand, and after rolling a little, she too was at rest. Lying at full length, his arms free of the blanket thrown wide to each side, Jackson breathed heavily, evenly. His last thought had been of Nannette, and it had been pleasant, for as he slept there was a smile on his face. The cowpuncher dropped to sleep knowing full well that the fire could not last the entire night, but there was Romulus with his keen sense of hearing and scent and loyal friendship. He must depend upon the bulldog, for to-morrow they expected a hard day. Nannette's blanket had not stirred since Romulus heard her whisper "Mon cher Georges." She lay still as death.

Old Man again prepared to approach the camp. The breeze still made itself felt, but it was blowing toward him, and thus favored whatever plans he might have. Only a few dying embers of the fire remained, but the aggressive bulldog continued to sleep — he was as motionless as a dead dog.

Instinct, wolf-language — something — made the unwelcome young wolves understand, and they sat quiet, expectant, impatient on their thin haunches the while Old Man renewed his advance, almost creeping, belly close to the sand. There must be no mistake this time — no rousing of the bulldog on guard.

Pausing, the old lobo sniffed with suspicion. A scent other than

that of the arid prairie had reached his nostrils. He turned to observe his younger confreres, and they too appeared to be sensible to a new element of possible danger.

Old Man Lobo knew that during the hot months moonlight on the desert is treacherous — uncanny shadows play and deceive — yet he was quite sure that in the distance he could see tangible things, and retraced his way to where his young companions were. All four were on the qui vive, alert. The sound of footsteps in the floury sand now came to their keen ears — the plut-plut made by the feet of quadrupeds, and not the single tread of a human footstep. The wolves were encouraged; it must be a small band of stray cattle, driven away by a round-up, perhaps. When three shadowy shapes became visible, even the leader was excited. They forgot the sleeping camp, which had so many dangers connected with a raid upon it.

Listen as attentively as they might, the wolves heard not a sound except the muffled steps of the approaching little band. With one accord the four sometime wild dogs began to slowly creep to meet the newcomers. They were desperately anxious for a row, it appeared.

When but a few hundred feet from the new objects of attack, one of the young animals, casting away all restraint and caution, bounded ahead and made straight for the expected prey. His companions had hardly time to recover from their surprise at his action, when they were startled and confused by a flash of fire and the sharp report of a firearm — and all knew that they were men whom they had attacked. Too late to retreat now! Men, the wolves knew, had a way of reaching one across space and inflicting death. It was best to close in and quickly end the fight. All rushed forward. Old Man leaped at the throat of a Mexican mustang and threw both horse and rider to the sand. The man's neck was broken by the fall. One wolf lay dead, stretched on the sand. Another horse galloped away, dragging a man whose foot was caught in his stirrup. A young wolf followed the runaway. The others were fighting their way for their own lives and to succeed.

It appeared that the men were as surprised at the onslaught as the wolves were at the character of those they had attacked, for not a word was spoken. It had gone well with the des-

perate lobos. Old Man was standing over his victims — the man with the broken neck and the mustang whose life he had ended by tearing his throat; another man was making a futile attempt to escape on foot across the prairie; still another was engaged in a hand-to-hand struggle with a strong young animal — when a hoarse cry came to the ears of all from the vicinity of the sleeping camp.

The first shot had awakened Romulus. Scrambling to his feet, the bulldog listened for a moment, and then jumped into Jackson's face to awaken him. From Jackson, Romulus rushed to the side of Nannette, and now stood guard over her, while she lay, trembling, yet quite bravely awaiting a word from her lover.

Jackson called loudly across the sands, "Who's there?" Now, all were wide awake and prepared to fight. No clear idea of what was transpiring came to them, but that it did not bode good things they were satisfied.

After a moment Nannette came to Jackson's side and quietly took a heavy revolver from him. With a pretty, brave, tremulous little smile, she levelled the gun across the mare's back — and with Jackson's arm about her waist, looked the small Amazon, prepared to defend her own life and those whom she loved.

With the cessation of the sound of conflict, the runaways relaxed a trifle. All except Romulus, who remained an outpost guard, alert, watchful. Only repeated admonitions from Jackson kept him from reconnoitering. Thus passed one, two, three hours of painful, silent anxiety, until daybreak.

"We will go now, Nannette, dear, and see what it is that lies out there," said Jackson to the dark little woman. "Come, Romulus. Take your place as 'drum major,'" he concluded.

They would have left the bronco mare and her colt behind, only that she threatened to pull up the mesquite root to which she was tied, so anxious was she to be of the party. And thus they crossed the distance to where they could see a jumble of objects on the still, white prairie.

"You remain here with Romulus and the ponies, Nannette," Jackson said, when they were still some hundred yards from the prostrate heap. "Perhaps you hadn't better see this."

Nannette saw Jackson remove his sombrero the moment he

reached the vicinity of the night combat. Then she could see him take a blanket and throw it over an object. He motioned that she should go back to their camp, which she did.

It was an hour before Jackson returned, and when he reached her side and took both of her hands in his and looked in her face with grave, tender eyes, Nannette thought he assumed a different, a new attitude.

"It was Martinez, Nannette," he said. "Martinez and a band of Rurales seeking us outside of their jurisdiction — when they met a pack of lobo wolves that had probably intended to attack us." Nannette was inclined to tears.

"Is — is Martinez — out there?" she asked, pointing to the place from which Jackson had just returned.

"Yes, Nannette, Martinez is dead."

"Now, will you take — shall I go and live in that convent?" Nannette asked.

The Meeting.*

BY CLIFFORD HOWARD.

HE did not heed me when I first accosted him. It was not until I ran up close to the buggy and repeated my salutation, that he drew rein and seemed to wake from his reverie.

"Excuse me," I said; "but if you are going into town, would you mind letting me ride with you?"

"Why, no, I guess not," he answered indifferently; and without further invitation he moved to one side, to make room for me.

"I have been out for a tramp across the country," I explained to him, as I seated myself beside him, "and I find I have miscalculated my time. I am due at home by three-thirty, and it's within half an hour of that now. Otherwise, I would not have troubled you."

"'Tain't no trouble," replied the man quietly, as he coaxed the horse into a trot with a gentle flap of the lines. "Nothing ain't no trouble to me now." A fleeting smile illumined his countenance, and his eyes grew suddenly bright as a boy's. "I'm on my way to meet my wife," he added, after a moment's silence. "I ain't seen her for more 'an a year. It's a year last April."

"She's been away quite awhile," I commented. "You must have missed her."

"Missed her!" The man did not raise his voice nor did he turn to look at me. Only the tense quiver in his tone revealed his earnestness.

I waited for him to proceed, but he held his peace. The light had faded from his countenance, leaving it again dull and almost expressionless; but in his eyes — grown soft as with the near approach of tears — I caught a gleam of some deep-hid emotion. He was looking straight before him, across the green June meadows and wooded hills to the soft-blue mountains in the west.

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"This has been a beautiful day," I ventured to remark.

"Yes," he responded slowly; "it *is* a beautiful day. I ain't ever seen the country look so sweet and quiet and peaceful-like. It reminds me of her. To-morrow will be four years that we were married. It was just such a day as this." He let his gaze rove dreamily over the landscape, and then once more rested it upon the distant mountains.

"You will be glad to see her again," I said, feeling that I ought to say something.

His face again lighted up with a smile — a smile radiant with joy. But this was his only response. He did not speak — not until we had gone another half mile. Then he said: "You see that big white cloud over the mountain there? What does it look like to you? What does it make you think of?" He did not wait for an answer, but continued at once, speaking more to himself than to me: "I can see a beautiful river and gardens and fountains; and there's a little valley, with the sunlight shining in it. And you would never know there was any separation or any sorrow or any suffering; it's all over now. To look at it off yonder it seems like it's a long way off, and so it has been; but it's only a little way now; only a little way. 'Twon't be sundown before we're together again, Mary and me."

He lapsed once more into silence; his eyes fixed upon the glorious mass of summer cloud that towered above the mountain, and his smiling lips a-tremble with unuttered feeling.

I made no further effort to engage him in conversation; nor did I speak again until, reaching the outskirts of the town, we turned into the street leading down to the station. Then I touched him on the arm and asked him to slow up, that I might alight, as I had got as nearly home as his way would take me.

He brought his horse to a stop and waited for me to get safely out. "I'm a thousand times obliged to you," I said. "It was very good of you to bring me this far."

"That's all right," he answered, after a moment's wait; "don't mention it." He paused again and looked at me as though he would say something more; but he merely smiled, and, clucking to his horse, started off down the street without an added word.

. . . . . .

The sun had set, and the soft twilight of the peaceful day lent a transient charm even to the dingy and unkempt street that straggled along the river front. A business engagement had called me to that part of town immediately after tea. And now as I was strolling homeward, conscious for the first time of being fatigued by my morning's tramp in the country, I was attracted by a crowd of men and boys at one of the boat landings.

"What's the trouble?" I asked of those on the outside of the circle, as I joined the throng.

"Some one's been drowned," was the answer.

I worked my way through to the centre; and there, lying before me, dead and cold in the fading light, was he with whom I had ridden into town only a few hours before.

Some one near me mentioned his name, and another recounted that a boy had seen him fall from the bridge a short distance up the river. There was a choke in my throat as I stood there for a moment and gazed upon him, a tragic example of the uncertainty of life and happiness. And his wife, thought I, what of her? Almost involuntarily I turned and spoke to a man standing beside me:

"Tell me," I said, "have you heard them say anything about his wife? I happen to know that he drove in from the country this afternoon, to meet her here."

"His wife!" returned the man, staring at me in curious amazement: "Why, my dear sir, his wife's been dead for over a year!"

The Reapers.*

BY BATTERMAN LINDSAY.

[This story, which appeared in THE BLACK CAT thirteen years ago, is reprinted here in response to frequent requests.]

OME years ago, when the Boom was abroad in the land, it invaded the Northwest Territory with peculiar frenzy. Cities sprang up out of the prairie as by enchantment; not tent and shanty "cities," mind, but metropolises, with long, straight streets, and imposing brick and stone blocks which housed banks, real estate offices, hotels, real estate offices, saloons, and restaurants, and real estate offices, commercial establishments, real estate offices. Tram-car lines were projected, if not built, and electricity made night luminous. Presently, when the town lots were all sold, the speculators departed, and the investors settled down to business, and began eating each other while waiting for the country to settle up and railroads and commerce to arrive. When they had exchanged commodities with one another until their stocks were exhausted, or foreclosed by the wholesalers in Toronto, Victoria, or St. Paul, they silently stole away, one by one, without folding their tents, which remained as monuments of man's gullibility.

To one of these deserted cities, from which the Last Inhabitant had fled some time since, there came one afternoon in spring the Reapers, a man and woman. They came from the South, in a Concord coach, filled to its utmost capacity with their effects, and took possession of the town. They chose their domicile gayly, with reference to a convenient stable for their horses, of which they had four. Two they turned adrift to shift for themselves, and two they kept. The home of their choice was a Queen Anne cottage in the suburbs, where a few neglected rosebushes still survived in the garden.

"If we get tired of housekeeping, dear, you know we can go

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and live at the hotel," said the woman, and she laughed delightfully.

"Yes," said the man, "or we can take a suite of rooms and board at the restaurant," and then they both laughed.

It was great larks, getting settled in their house. The woman, who was rosy, and plump, and dimpled, did not perform much of the hard work, but her laugh was an incentive. She sat about on boxes, with her skirts tucked up, and supervised, or on the veranda railing and watching the pruning of the rose-bushes, which she had a fancy for reclaiming. She was not much of a cook, but they managed between them, with many fugitive caresses, by the way, to prepare sufficient for their needs. Laughter, and song, and foolish badinage made the hours fleet. If there were a Past that it would have been burdensome to remember, neither remembered it. This was a new world, and they were primal creatures in it, beloved of the dew and the sun, the moon and the stars in their courses.

When the weather tempted, they rode about the country, exploring it. They hunted together, he teaching her to be expert with her small rifle ; the hunting was pastime, but it was also needful to vary the larder. He planted and tended a garden, that they might have salads and green peas, and potatoes for the winter. (He had been a farmer's son before he was a bank president.) In the evenings, as they sat on the piazza, she played the mandolin and they sang college ditties together.

Theirs was an idyllic existence, and a moralist would have been incensed to observe how kindly was nature, and how little remorse preyed upon their minds. Everything was food for amusement. The pyramid of tins, of all shapes and sizes, that grew up in the back lot as the canned goods disappeared from their storeroom, in appeasement of their wonderful appetites, they called the Tower of Babel, because of the variety of languages that found representation on the labels.

They laughed at the acoustic effects which accompanied their footsteps through the empty streets. She said it was the Ghost of the Boom prowling around the haunts of his former triumphs.

They explored the deserted buildings, and rooted out all sorts of flotsam and jetsam. Once it was a bundle of love-letters left

in a bureau drawer. They read them with shouts of mockery. Again it was a row of empty fruit jars, which they appropriated to put over their tomato plants. Another time it was a pile of advertising circulars setting forth in florid terms the advantages of their present place of residence.

"The advantage of its solitude was the one advantage they never thought of advertising; and now it is the only one that procures it the honor of our society," said the man, and, as usual, they laughed.

Then it was a pile of old periodicals, that they carried away and devoured with avidity — which was a bad symptom, if they had stopped to think of it. They went into the rotunda of the hotel, and tried all sorts of vocal gymnastics to rouse the echoes in the tiers of empty rooms. They took Solitude by the ears, as it were, and made faces at it, and laughed always.

They got into the way of calling themselves Adam and Eve, and said to each other that they were happier outside the garden than ever they were within it.

"Is not this divine?" said Eve, as they sat one twilight hour on the steps of their little porch, her head upon his shoulder. "We thought it would be an exile, but it is heaven. I don't want ever to go back among people. Here we are all-sufficing to each other, but back in the world, some day, some one would find us out and point the finger at us."

The man tightened his clasp around her supple form. "You know," he replied gravely, "that we counted upon that. You thought you would be able to bear all that, and more, for love's dear sake."

"And so I can," she said; "but this is better."

"Well," he replied again, "we have the best part of a year before us, you know, for you to change your mind in. By the time the supplies have given out, I fancy you will want to see people, if only at a distance. Everybody will have given up looking for us by that time, and we can slip away to South America somewhere for awhile, and be as secluded as ever you please, and still within reach of human companionship, if we desire it."

"Have you looked at the money lately?" she asked irrelevantly.

"Who would steal it?" he returned, laughing.

"Anyway, let's look at it," she persisted.

So they went inside, lit a lamp, and undid their boxes and examined the hoard. "It is not so much, after all," she said discontentedly. "You never can do anything with all those papers. Why not burn them? They are a great weight to carry about."

"No, they are of no value to me," he replied. "But they are of immense value to other fellows. Some day I shall be able to make terms with those, and then we can live where we please."

"Do you believe," she asked, drumming absently on the edge of a box with her taper fingers, and not looking at him, "do you believe, really believe in your heart, that you will be able to slip away so easily when we go out of here — back again among people?"

"If I didn't believe it, I should not have undertaken it," he answered. "Don't you believe it, too? You did once."

"Did I?" she said. "No, I never looked so far ahead. I don't now, for that matter. The present is enough for me. Don't let's lose any more of it mooning over this horrid box. Come away."

As the autumn approached, life began to wear a less holiday aspect. Fuel must be provided for the long winter; the wild grass, growing rankly in the city streets, must be cut and cured for the horses; the potatoes must be dug and stored. Eve followed Adam about everywhere. Two is company, but one is a crowd, in a deserted place. Too many viewless things make themselves felt and heard under such circumstances.

"What were we thinking of, that we didn't fetch a dog?" said Eve one day. "He would have been a lot of company, and protection, too."

"Protection from what, the serpent?" asked Adam, and then they both laughed.

One night one of the horses was taken sick. The man came in after a lantern, and the woman followed him out. All night they worked over the animal, fomenting him with hot water, and dosing him like a Christian. In the morning he was better. "Dear," said Eve — then, not before, "what would become of us if anything were to happen to the horses?"

"We should have to invent a flying machine," the man answered lightly; but there were lines in his face that were not there the day before. With the first rain of autumn, their cottage leaked like a sieve. "We shall have to go to the hotel," they said simultaneously.

Accordingly, they moved as soon as the storm was over. They chose a sunny suite of rooms, with windows facing the south, transferred their belongings, and made themselves cozy for the winter. Of stoves and ranges, as well as many other bulky articles of furniture, they had their choice. It was while this flitting was in progress that a queer thing happened. Adam was away with the wagon, and Eve was alone in their apartment, arranging it with housewifely instinct; quite absorbed in her occupation, and humming softly to herself, she was not in the least startled just at first, when a little cooing voice behind her said "Mamma!" "Yes, dear, what is it?" she answered, with her mouth full of tacks. Then, at the sound of her own voice in the empty room, she threw up her head and looked about her, aghast, breathless, beads of perspiration starting out on her face, suddenly grown pallid with the pallor of a corpse. After an instant she cast herself on her knees, half beside, half over a couch, and sobbed with the abandonment of despair. Thus Adam found her when he came back. It was the beginning of the end. He never left her alone again, longer than to go downstairs after an armful of wood, but even in the midst of conversation she would stop and say, "Listen! Now don't you hear it, the steps in the hallway?"

To be sure, the great, empty building was full of whisperings and patterings, rustlings, and sighings, and moanings, enough to shake stronger nerves than hers. Often a low, intermittent hum went on, like the buzz of voices. At times they could all but make out the words of the conversation. That, he satisfied her, was a draft of air circling about in the rotunda. The footfalls he never could hear. The voice she said nothing about; and indeed it was a good while before she heard it again.

But the footfalls and the whisperings were more than she could endure. "Let us go! Let us leave this dreadful place!" she murmured pleadingly at last.

"I am afraid it is too late," he replied, regarding her anxiously.

"It is liable to snow any day now. But we will move. We will find some smaller, cozier house, where there are not so many noises and echoes. We will go and look for one right now."

They went out under a leaden sky, and found a residence in tolerable repair that gave promise of dry quarters; but the search had consumed the afternoon, and the moving must be deferred until the morrow. When the morrow dawned, the snow was falling in a cloud, and any change of base was out of the question. So then they set themselves to endure with cheerfulness. Neither was a weakling. They kept themselves busy. He split wood and minded the horses, and she kept with him and helped him. She cooked and swept, and he helped her. They played the mandolin and sang, and beat one another at cards. Every day he promenaded her up and down the halls and long dining-room so many miles for a constitutional. He made a bow and arrows, and they practised archery. They played paper chase through the rooms, and, when hunted too closely, she would recall a childish accomplishment to her aid, and slide down the banisters! Outside the snow fell and drifted, and the silence of the summer became in their memories as the clatter of looms in comparison with this silence of winter, broken only by the fall of mimic avalanches from the eaves of some house, or the howl of a gray wolf drawn from afar by the scent of their beasts, stabled in the basement.

Eve seemed well on the way to recovery from her temporary panic, when one day she heard the little Voice again. They were having a paper chase, and she was eagerly pursuing Adam through the empty rooms, when the Voice said, "Mamma!" and brought her up short. After that it spoke to her with increasing frequency; never when she was listening for it and dreading it, or (as she sometimes did) longing for it, but always when she was busy and absorbed in something else; or waking her up out of sleep, and bringing her upright in her bed, trembling like a leaf, and with wide eyes staring into the darkness. It never said aught but "Mamma!" or repeated it the second time; but she came to know at last, that from any momentary respite of self-forgetfulness, or fragmentary happiness, the little Voice would call her back to her penance. Sometimes, after it had spoken, she

could hear the patter of tiny feet in the hallway or on the stairs.

So the weeks went by over the dwellers in the abandoned city, until one night they were aroused by hearing one of the horses below stamping extraordinarily. Adam arose and went down hastily to see what was amiss. He could not discover that anything was, and returned, shivering, up the stairs. The bed was empty, and in a panic he searched about the rooms, lantern in hand. At length he found Eve cowering in a corner. "Eve! Eve! What is it?" he cried, afraid to touch her. She did not answer, and her eyes reflected the light from the lantern like an animal's. "What is the matter with you, dear? Don't you know me?" he asked again, pleadingly, raising the lantern on high, so that the light fell upon his face. Reason came back to her eyes slowly.

"Oh, is it you? she said. "I did not know who you were at first." After that he grew in a manner accustomed to behold that strange film glaze her eyes, when for a moment, as she told him, her world grew strange to her, and each familiar object became something never seen before.

One day, when he had been after an armful of wood, she had disappeared on his return. He sought her from room to room, through the echoing halls, opening every door, calling her name aloud at first; but ceasing finally, lest the echoes should add to her fright. At last, on the third floor, he came to a door that was locked.

Behind that she must be; and he knocked, and called, and besought with phrases of love, that she would open to him, but there was neither word nor movement in response. Fearing to break the door in, lest she should fling herself from the window; fearing, too, lest she should perish in the cruel cold of the unwarmed chamber, he framed a desperate resolution. He entered the room adjoining the locked one, and, softly raising the window, crept out upon a narrow ornamental cornice which ran around the building below this third tier of windows. It was coated with ice, and a chance as desperate as a man would care to take in any strait. But because he was reckless of consequences, he passed in safety the short distance separating the windows, and stood on the sill of the next in comparative safety. If he found

the window fast, his daring were in vain ; but it proved not to be.

He raised the sash with the heedfulness necessitated by his situation, and let himself into the room, but the woman there was oblivious to his presence. She was kneeling in the vacant room, upon the bare floor, surrounded by the empty white walls, with her head drooping, and arms moving gently back and forth as if swaying a cradle, while she smiled and crooned a soft lullaby. Noiselessly he turned the key in the lock and stole away ; he returned presently with a blanket, and gently enwrapped that kneeling form, all unconscious of his touch, which had once had power by its lightest impress to send an answering thrill along every fiber of sensation throughout her frame. And then he left her to awake in her own time from a dream to which he never referred. But the day was one that deepened the lines that the year had graven on his forehead.

. . . . . .

At length there came, one eve, a strange wind out of the upper sky ; all night it blustered, and raved, and raced through the empty streets with a noise as of marching battalions. And in the dawn, great masses of snow began to come thundering down from the roofs with rush and roar. A January thaw had set in, and the air was vocal with a thousand lispings, and tricklings, and tinklings, and gurglings, and cracklings, and creepings. The very joists in the wall seemed to be feeling the running of sap in their fibres ; and a fine ear might almost have detected the dance of the atoms as they took new partners and arranged themselves in new combinations throughout the northern hemisphere.

" Now let us go ! let us go ! " cried Eve eagerly, as she woke and hearkened ; " away from this awful place ! " All day the strange wind blew, and under their eyes as they watched, the snow vanished, and the brown, wet earth steamed in the sun.

On the second day they turned their faces southward, their wagon weighted with their scanty stores — and the treasure-box.

The prairie lay bare before them, but the man knew well that the mountain passes which rose between them and freedom were still choked with snow.

But the woman said, " Go ! I must go, whatever comes of it ! "

and he made no further demur. So they wended onward, over the moisture-reeking land, with its swollen streams and myriad pools in every hollow of the plain.

. . . . . .

It was some weeks later that the Avenger found them, and when he found, his hand fell empty of its vengeance ; for this was the manner of it : Frozen, standing upright in a huge snowdrift, where the blizzard had overtaken him, was the man. With his gloved hand shielding his brow, he was gazing southward, as if mapping out a path on the plain below. At his back gaped the portal of a mountain defile, a wintry chaos of glacier-riven rock and snow-laden firs, drooping like weeping willows under their icy burden.

Passing his enemy by, the Avenger pressed on into the gorge ; around its first turn, in a sheltered nook, he found her whom he sought. But his hand fell empty again, whether of vengeance or of pardon ; for on her, too, the ice-king had breathed. She was crouched before the ashes of the extinct fire ; around her lay scattered widely the contents of the treasure-box ; while clutched close to her breast by her rigid fingers, as though she would shield it from the storm, lay a strange bundle — a faded shawl rolled into the semblance of the muffled form of a child. Upon the frozen whiteness of the icy wall behind her were traced with a blackened ember, in a woman's uncertain handwriting, these words : —

" The Wages of Sin is Death."

Afar off in the wilderness the beasts of the wild prowl through a deserted city, moldering into decay while yet the timbers of its framing are unseasoned ; and the Ghost of the Boom remains in undisturbed possession of his kingdom.

The Coming and Going of Slats.*

BY O. B. SEELY.

PEAKIN' of luck" said the old Railroad Agent, "the most severe case of hard luck I ever encountered belonged to a chap I once knew down at Coyote Springs, Arizona. Coyote Springs was a railroad station on the Santa Fe down on the Arizona desert. I have seen Coyotes there but no springs. The water for the berg is all shipped in from Tuscon so I don't see where the springs come in.

"Well, I happened to be Station Agent, Express Agent and Telegraph Operator at this town about fifteen years ago.

"One day when the local pulls in a passenger gets off, which in itself is quite an event. This passenger was a long, lean individual and it wouldn't take any one very long to see what's brought him down into the Arizona desert. Every one has some reason for coming to such a place and every one is figuring on getting away just as soon as he has made his little stake.

"This tenderfoot didn't make any secret of it as most of 'em do, didn't say he had bronchitis or throat trouble, but came right out and said he was a one lunger and had left his folks back in the States and come out here to see if he couldn't get well. Well if there's any place under the sun where a man can sidetrack the great white plague it's down on the Arizona desert, where winter never comes and the nearest approach you get to it is when the desert stands on edge in a sand storm and the drifts are of sand instead of the snow we used to see back in the States.

"Well, the stranger comes over to the ticket window and makes himself acquainted with me. He says his name's T. Montgomery Wellington, but I explained to him that if he intends remaining in our rising little city that a name like that is a kind of a drawback to a man. In fact, I tell him, the miners and cattlemen who

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inhabit the berg will name him themselves for some prominent peculiarity he possesses. He said it was all right and that he wanted some light work that would help him to meet expenses while he was getting back his health. I told him if he proved to be all right the men of the camp would help him, for no deserving chap ever gets turned down in an Arizona mining town. In this respect they show that they have not yet been educated up to the standard of the East. 'What have you in the way of amusements here?' the stranger asks. I explained to him that there was plenty, especially as every one was only staying in the berg until they could make enough to get back to 'God's Country' which is back in the States or Los Angeles, according to where you was raised. I told him how we had a good dance hall, most of the ladies therein having immigrated from Los Angeles when an acute moral attack hit that city, also that we had five good saloons and poker and faro running full blast in all of them.

"Now a man can't be too particular in the desert country about amusement or else he's not going to get any, so I used to sit in at the games for a little pastime and it also netted me a few dollars toward the stake I was saving to get out on. I told Mr. Wellington he had better come over to the Golden West Saloon that night, meet the boys and play cards with them. He said he played whist and casino, but I told him maybe he better not mention those games if he understands poker. Well he came around that night, got acquainted and played a few sociable games with the boys. They all seemed to like him because he didn't talk of the greatness of the East and was so frank about what was ailin' him. After a while Jim Parks, the deputy sheriff, calls everybody up to the bar. The stranger sat still and Parks says again, looking at the stranger, 'Everybody up to the bar, come on, Slats.'

"Right there was where he got his name, just as I told him he would.

"Doc Leonard then explains to him how, contrary to all stories of the West, a gent don't have to drink but can take a cigar without shortening his life any. But the newcomer, probably having bought a cigar at Tuscon when he came through there, takes a little stimulant for his stomach which increases the admiration of the boys for him.

"Well we all tried to help him, sometimes even fixing up a job or two for him to do. It wasn't long until we all began to notice the hard luck Slats had coming to him. He tries to ride a cow pony that hasn't any more interest in life than a cholo, but right then the pony picks up wonderfully, bucks him off and lays him up several weeks with a broken arm. This pony had never before shown enough ambition to do anything like that. He also is kicked by a mule, sprains his ankle, and has the toothache all in one day. Every time he tries to do anything something happens to him. He often takes a little hand at poker in the Golden West Saloon, but every time he holds three kings some one else holds three aces. I had him help me load some ore one day at the depot, that is for a few hours until a sack of ore falls on him and he has to quit. Jim Parks says there's no use trying to get away from luck like that, that Slats has a jinks on him and he hopes it's not catching.

"Well this kind of luck goes on for two years with Slats and he gets weaker all the time. He often talks about going back to Illinois to his folks, and he inquires rates of me and looks up railroad connections, but of course he can't go, on account of the railroad company refusing to haul people for nothing. Several times he saves up a few dollars, but it all goes for medicine and stuff. The boys wanted to fix up a purse for him to go back east on, but he was one of those fellows you can't give anything to.

"Our town doctor, Doc Leonard, who left a good practice back east to come out west and practice his profession on account of a little misunderstanding, says it won't be long now before Slats will be all through coughing. The doc says he was too far gone when he came even for the Arizona desert to save him. We all felt kind of bad to hear this because this chap had shown himself to be white, nursing men who had got hurt or who had stopped a bullet. I remember one Christmas he got up a Christmas tree, the first one we ever had in Coyote Springs. He saw that every man in the camp got a present of some kind. It made some of us feel a little queer to get a present, it being a good many years since any one had taken the trouble to do anything like that. We saw that his heart was all right if his lungs and his luck was bad.

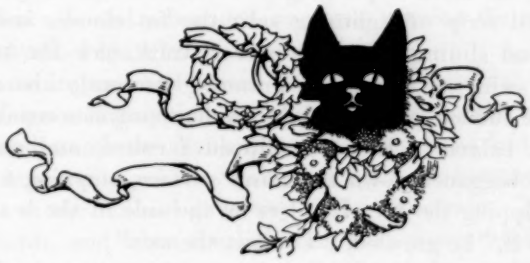
"But his luck turned finally. One night in the Golden West Saloon we were all having a highly interesting session of poker. Slats, who had been talking all day about going back to his relatives, comes in wearing the big overcoat he always wears now and stands around solemn-like watching the game. Presently in walks a young Mexican wanting Doc Leonard, who's in the game, to come and sew up another greaser who's been carved some by a fellow countryman while celebrating the third holiday they had had that week. By the way, I see its customary in the east to write poetry and songs about the Mexicans, making them very interesting and picturesque. Out here we don't fancy the saddle-colored chaps much, not fancying a man in overalls with a cigarette attached, who is always celebrating a holiday and is going to do something to-morrow. Well, Doc Leonard has to leave the game so he says to Slats, who is standing behind him, 'Here, Sport, take my hand and play my chips. I've won a hundred. I don't mind you losing some of it back to these gentlemen with your hard luck. I'll go sew up this manana boy so the R. R. can use him.' As Doc goes out the door he shouts back to Slats, 'All you win is yours.' Every one has to laugh at this, not that Slats don't savey the game, but it's a known fact that Slats can't win a hand at poker, or anything else for that matter. Slats takes Doc's chair. 'I'll just go back and see the folks if I win seventy-five to-night' says Slats.

"The boys would let him win, but we all take too much interest in poker to do it that way. While the deal is going on Slats asks me if he can make connection at Kansas City for Bingville, Illinois, where he came from. I told him yes and noticed a time card sticking out of his pocket. He then asks me several more questions which I answers. I don't believe I would have been so patient about answering all his questions if I hadn't been in the habit of taking these time card trips myself quite frequently.

"Well, we played a few hands, Slats losing a few dollars of Doc's money. Then on a fresh deal, when there's fifteen dollars in the pot, Slats bets twenty-five dollars. Jim Parks calls the bet and having three queens myself, I stay with them. 'I call you, what have you got, Slats?' I asked, shoving the money to the centre. But Slats still hangs on to his cards. We notice his chin

has dropped down on his breast. Jim Parks jumps up and runs over to him. 'It's all over with Slats, and he never got to go back to Illinoy to see his folks,' says Jim.

"In the meantime Doc Leonard has returned and takes in the whole situation. He walks over and looks at the cards still held in Slats' hand and says, 'I'm here to announce that this chap has a heart flush with a king at the top. He has won ninety-five dollars under my agreement and he goes back to Illinois on No. 8 to-morrow.'"



At the Bridge.*

BY JAMES FRANCIS DWYER.

IGHT fell like a black pall upon the barren hills. Out of a chrome-colored rent, low down on the western horizon, came a wind that skimmed the froth from the torrent that foamed under the rain fusillade. The great drops hissed downwards as if fired from heavenly artillery. The water gurgled down the slippery banks and flung itself into the torrent that roared protestingly as the hills shouldered it in the narrow places. The stream looked like a monster serpent, sinuous, spiteful, slimy, growing stronger each moment as the black slopes gorged it with their offerings.

A jagged strip of lightning split the fat clouds, and a man, slipping and sliding down the narrow track, saw for an instant the little, swinging foot-bridge fluttering nervously above the torrent. The sudden glimpse of the swollen stream seemed to upset the man's balance. His feet slipped forward, and with many oaths he tobogganed down the glassy surface, stopping himself at last by gripping the lava boulders on the side of the beaten path.

"Curse it," he growled, "I've lost the axe."

On hands and knees he crawled upwards, feeling carefully over the ground that he had just covered in such undignified haste. The water, rushing down to join the torrent, sprang into the openings of his big thigh boots, spurted up his forearms and played with his great beard as he brought his face closer to the ground and tried vainly to pierce the darkness.

"I must have slipped quite a bit," he murmured. "If I don't find the axe I can't — Ah!"

The black dome was torn again by a wicked thread of silver, and in the ghastly light the man's hand reached forward and closed on the missing axe. With a growl expressing his pleasure at

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the recovery of the implement, he turned and moved cautiously down the slope.

On the little shale ledge where the wire ropes supporting the bridge were fastened securely to the rocky bank, the man stood for a moment. Then, grasping the axe with his right hand and with his left gripping one of the strong hawsers to which the iron yokes supporting the planking were securely fastened, he stepped on to the swaying structure and moved out towards the middle of the stream. The bridge trembled under his heavy tread — trembled as if afraid of the white-lipped waves that lurched upwards at the swaying planks.

Reaching the centre, he steadied himself by placing a foot against each side of the iron yoke, and then, swinging the axe, brought it down with a slanting stroke inside the hawser so that it bit sharply into the narrow plank. A shower of chips dived into the current, and the bridge rocked tremulously beneath his blows. He changed hands and hacked furiously. Once the axe hit the wire rope and rebounded, narrowly missing the man's face, but he redoubled his efforts.

At last he stopped and moved cautiously backwards. Kneeling on the bridge and gripping the axe with both hands, he reached forward and smote the plank the end of which he had cut away from its supporting yoke. Again and again he hammered it till the spikes at the far end gave way under the strain. He pushed it downwards, and when the lightning flashed wrathfully he saw the white waters reach up to the sagging timber and wrench it mightily. In the darkness that followed the flash, his imagination pictured the gap — a great black mouth waiting to choke the life out of the stumbling pedestrian. For a moment he stood gazing at the spot, and then he made his way back over the swinging structure and climbed up the slippery slope.

Ten minutes afterwards the man entered one of the small cabins that crouched like frightened things near the gaunt mine buildings. It was a miserable two-roomed shack, and the loosely hinged outer door rattled violently after it was barricaded from within. In the outer room there was an odor of coarse cooking, of steaming suds, of things mouldy and damp.

The room was empty, and the man only paused long enough to

pull off his great boots before tiptoeing cautiously to the door leading into the bedroom. He opened it carefully, and a woman's head, nodding in the aureole of yellow light thrown by the small oil lamp, was jerked backwards and the sleepy eyes blinked at him nervously. The man came closer, and the woman lifted an admonishing finger as he rolled awkwardly in trying to balance himself on his toes.

"How is she?" he questioned hoarsely.

"H'sh, she's asleep," whispered the woman. "I think she's a little better." She lifted the lamp a few inches and the subdued yellow light fell upon a child sleeping on the bed.

The man moved closer and the woman watched him nervously. He leaned over the sleeper, and with his head turned sideways listened to the labored breathing.

"Not so much of that chokin' sound," he murmured. "'Er throat is a bit clearer."

The woman nodded. "I think she has passed the worst of it," she said.

The man still bent over the bed, his huge form silhouetted on the whitewashed wall behind. Presently the woman became aware of his wet condition and she moved him back with thin, wasted hands. At that moment the child stirred, the shawl that was tucked around her throat was flung back, and the movement exposed a tiny toy bear that was snuggled in her arms.

The man glanced at the toy and then swung his face towards the woman.

"What's that?" he growled. "Who gave her that?"

"It's a little toy," stammered the woman. "H'sh, Mike, it's only a little toy."

"Who gave it to her?"

The woman put her finger on her lips and held up her hand, but the man moved quickly from the bed and gripping her wrist pulled her roughly into the outer room.

"Who gave her that?" he demanded.

"Doris — Doris Merrick," spluttered the woman. "Oh, Mike — Oh!"

The man's fingers gripped the thin arm till the woman sobbed protestingly.

"What did you take it for?" he growled.

"I couldn't help it," sobbed the woman. "Mike, dear, Kitty saw the little thing before I could refuse it. Ah, she did."

She lifted up the coarse apron and sopped at the tear currents that raced down her cheeks. The man cursed incoherently.

"Do you know where Merrick is to-night?" he cried. "Do you? I didn't tell yer. The swine 'as gone over to Elliston huntin' fer scabs to break the strike!"

"An' what's that to do with the little bear?" sobbed the woman.

"Why, his kid give it to yer. We ain't takin' anythin' from a sweatin' boss or his brats!"

He made a movement to enter the inner room, but the woman clung to his arm and he stopped.

"Oh, Mike, don't take it from her," she screamed. "Ah, don't! The little dear ran down in the rain with it an'—an' Kitty saw it first. Mike, if you could have seen. Her two blue eyes swelled up like balloons wid joy. Mother o' God, could I refuse? Could I, Mike, tell me? She went to sleep huggin' it in her little arms. If you was the leader of fifty strikes I couldn't refuse it after she saw it."

The woman sank into the battered chair and buried her face in her apron. The man stood watching her for a second's space, then he unlatched the outer door and sprang into the night.

The cold blast of air awakened the woman from her fit of sobbing. She rushed to the threshold, tripping over the big thigh boots that lay where the man had thrown them a few minutes before.

"Mike," she shrieked. "Mike! Mike!" But no answer came back out of the blackness.

Down the track leading to the footbridge, Mike Hartigan, barefooted and bareheaded, stumbled blindly. The wind flung the rain in chilling douches into his face; the lava rocks battered his toes. He reached the incline directly above the bridge, slipped forward and went down the track head-foremost, but again, as he struck the little ledge, the lightning lit up the scene, and Hartigan gave a yell of agony.

"Merrick," he yelled. "Stop! Stop!"

The screaming torrent choked his cry with its deafening clamor and he sprang out on to the bridge. The water was very close to the planking, and it bubbled over the boards as he rushed forward, yelling and cursing. He reached the centre and stopped instinctively on the edge of the awful gap. For a moment he stood upright. Then he gripped the wire hawser, wound his legs around the iron support and flung himself forward. Something struck him, and he grasped it with his free hand. The waters swept over him, tugged at him till his arms ached, and the sinews in his legs cracked under the strain. The blood pounded through his head, but he dragged himself backwards, reached up and caught the wire and made of himself a barricade against which the current swept the man that he gripped with his right hand. The strain was fearful.

"Merrick," he roared. "Only one plank gone — climb — climb — "

The man clinging to Hartigan seemed to hear and understand. He had been blinded and stunned by the first plunge into the torrent, but now he shook himself and struggled to reach the hawser. He gripped Hartigan's legs and pulled himself up, crawled slowly forward till he felt the edge of the plank, and then, exerting all his strength, he lifted himself out of the water and fell face downwards upon the boards over which the waves were playing leap-frog.

For a moment he lay quite still. Then he turned and reached out with both hands over the gap.

"Where are you?" he screamed. "Hello! Hello! Speak out! Hello!"

But only the throaty gurgle of the torrent and the shriek of the froth-skimming wind answered his call.

The Old Piano.*

BY ELIZABETH EWING.

IT was a beautiful instrument, although quaintly old-fashioned, and it seemed strangely out of place in the small, meagrely furnished room.

The local buyer for the big piano house gazed upon it approvingly, vaguely wondered how it came to be in such surroundings, and mentally calculated the profit to the firm in purchasing, repairing, and reselling it. He noted with satisfaction the depth of tone in the rich, dark, walnut wood — so rare in these days — the straight classic lines of the uprights, the exquisitely hand-carved supports, and, above all, the magic name of the maker on the worn pedals. It was the name of the master-maker of that period. He drew the only chair in the room — a low black rocker — toward the instrument and with rapid and accustomed fingers struck deep chords of mellowing sweetness from the yellowing ivory keys, each as perfectly polished as a pair of loving old hands could make it.

The owner of the hands stood watching him anxiously. She was a little, frail old woman with a gentle, wrinkled face and dim eyes. A worn black dress hung in scanty folds on the feeble form and a small white woolen shawl covered her bent shoulders. The room was in keeping with her attire, scrupulously neat, but plainly, even poorly, furnished. A little two-burner gas stove rested on a stand in one corner, with the inevitable slate-colored zinc plate behind it. A narrow couch under the window, a few cheap prints on the walls and the little wide-armed black rocker with its cheerful chintz-covered cushion, comprised the rest of the furniture. A small square piece of carpet, which would naturally cover the centre of the room, had been drawn toward the wall for the piano to rest on. There it stood, exquisitely beautiful, redolent in some mysterious way of dried rose-leaves, filling the small room

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with its silent but dominant personality, and in some way, throwing over the poor surroundings an air of opulence and luxury.

The old woman's eyes anxiously followed the movements of the man's strong white hands as they swept up and down the keyboard and her hands nervously crossed and recrossed the shawl on her breast.

Hers was a common story. A bank failure had, years ago, swept away her small fortune, and since that time she had been wholly dependent on her nephew's son, her sole living relative. He was a good lad, a sailor, and his remittances, although irregularly forwarded, had been sufficient to supply her simple wants. His last voyage was to Australia.

"Good-bye, Granny," he had said, as, sun-browned and stalwart, he had kissed the old woman farewell. "I wish I could leave you more money, but I'll get rich this trip and soon send you plenty more. If you need any more meantime, you can always sell the piano, you know."

That was six months ago and the small sum, carefully treasured, sparingly expended, was gone — all save a dollar — and the rent was due. Hence the piano-buyer, and he looked with satisfaction at the fine old instrument, and, having concluded his mental calculations, offered her a sum, which, if not exactly munificent, was a concession to his conscience and her age and helplessness, and was sufficient to stave off the wolf for a long time to come.

The old woman drew a breath of relief and the look of sharp anxiety faded from her face.

"Thank you, sir," she said, gratefully. "When — when will you send for it?"

"To-morrow morning, madam."

"To-morrow morning" she repeated, with a little catch in her breath, — "to-morrow."

The man looked surprised. Her sudden distress touched him. She looked so frail and old; so pathetically unfitted for life's sales and barterings.

"Aren't you satisfied with the price?" he inquired, bending his shrewd brown eyes upon her.

"It is a good one," he added, remembering the concession to his conscience.

"Yes, yes, sir," she said, quickly, in an almost childish fright lest he should take the offer back.

"I am grateful to you, sir. I need the money. But," she added, more composedly, "If you will sit down a minute I will explain."

He found a seat on the narrow couch, and she in the little rocker. Her dim eyes sought his face with a beseeching look in their faded depths.

"If you could only give me two or three days more, sir, now I know I can sell it. — You must excuse me, sir," she faltered, "but I am an old woman and this piano and I have been together for forty years. It is all I have and I love it dear. 'Tis hard, hard, to part us now. My nephew may come at any time now, to-morrow — the next day — and then I would not have to sell it." The buyer looked surprised. "Yes, ma'am," he said, "I guess the firm will hold the offer over for a few days. But I would advise you to accept it. A bird in the hand, — you know" — with a well-meant attempt to soothe her evident distress, and," glancing at her wrinkled old hands, "I don't suppose you ever play on it, anyway."

"*I* play on it" softly ejaculated the old woman, surprised in turn. "Oh no, young man! I know the notes — with gentle pride — but I never knew how to play on it."

"Then you have kept it for an ornament? — or for old association's sake, perhaps," he asked.

"Yes," she said, with a simple pathos in her tremulous old voice. "This piano belongs to other days. It is not of this time. It is not an ordinary piano, the great master himself has played on it, many times. My daughter was his favorite pupil and often they played together in the summer evenings. Such music I heard in the old days, ah! Sometimes, when I am alone I hear it still, but it is very faint now."

"And your daughter" —

"Is dead," went on the quavering voice. "They are all dead. I have outlived my time and this is all I have left, young man — and my memories — my memories —" and the tremulous voice sank to a whisper.

The man felt uncomfortable. His thoughts flew vaguely to

his own mother who had died when he was a little lad. He hardly remembered her, and she had occupied but scant space in his thoughts since he had entered the world's arena. But now he found himself wondering if she would have looked like this gentle old soul, had she lived to be so old — so wrinkled, so frail, so lonely. He hoped not and rose to go, inwardly chafing at the thought. "Then you will let us know when to call for it?" he said, gently, as he opened the door.

"Yes, sir, and thank you. It will be in a few days, unless —" A flood of warm sunlight streamed into the room, bringing out the golden lights in the polished wood and yellowing keys of the piano and touching with its beneficent and impartial rays, even the dark corners of the little room. But the old woman did not notice. She closed the door and, walking heavily across the room, sank into the little rocker, her hands clasped, her lips moving in prayer.

. . . . . .

There is an end to all things, and a dollar — spin it out as you may — will not last forever, and she would not go in debt. So the end of the week found the shabby little black figure waiting at the counter of the big music store. The criss-cross lines in her face seemed deeper, her eyes more sunken. Even her form seemed frailer through the thin black shawl she wore. A dollar, spun out to its extreme limit, does not show particularly gratifying results.

"I will sell the piano now, if you please," she said, simply. "My — nephew has not come."

So it was arranged and the next day the old piano was carefully removed from the little room, the neighbors watching the proceedings with evident appreciation of the old woman's belated wisdom in parting with so useless a piece of furniture, and indulging in various speculations, not untinged with envy, as to the price she received for it.

And in the room stood the old woman gazing blankly at the vacant space — a goodly sum in her hand — and two slow tears, the tears of age, trickling down her withered cheeks.

. . . . . .

The piano, after undergoing sundry repairs, was duly installed

in one of the windows of the big piano house and its old-time quaintness induced many of the fashionables who daily passed to stop and admire.

But there was one — decidedly unfashionable — who came and went daily, no matter what the weather, one who stood patiently, interfering with no one, whose old eyes drank in lovingly every familiar curve, every note of that piano. She never remained long. It was a long distance from her little back street to the fashionable one on which *her* piano, as she still called it, now stood, and her failing strength was not equal to a long period of standing. One day she missed it. A clerk stood in the doorway, and with faltering voice she asked him if it was sold.

"Sold yesterday, madam," he said, briskly. "Can I" with a dubious glance at the worn black shawl and old-fashioned bonnet, "Can I show you something else?"

"No, thank you," she murmured brokenly and turned away. It was gone. The tie between them had snapped. She had, in a sub-conscious way, leaned on its strength, drawn from its presence her daily meed of love. Even in the store window it had seemed *hers,* and now it was gone — gone, like all else she had loved, into the shadowy past, and she was all alone.

She tottered home, but the brave old spirit was broken, the tired body worn out.

The next day a young sailor, sunburned and hearty, with bulging pockets and an armful of parcels, knocked at the door.

There was no response and he took the little pass-key with which she had provided him from his pocket and opened it.

She lay on the couch near the window, her worn hands crossed on her breast, and over her face hovered the mysterious half-smile that Death, ever pitiful, so often leaves on the faces of the old and weary.

A Subtle Retreat.*

BY ELIZABETH LAMBERT WOOD.

UNT WALCOTT stood near the steamer's railing, gazing along the waters of Puget Sound, trying to pierce the evening's gloom with eyes that burned, after months spent in inland China, for the healing sight of the bit of Washington that meant home — love! And love — mystic word dripping sweetness — meant Pauline, the handsomest girl in Tacoma.

Tossing overboard a half-smoked cigar, Walcott was musingly watching the hiss of its futile fight with the sea, when he was startled by the rush of a meteor athwart the sky just as a sudden shuddering seized and shook him until his very soul turned weak with nausea. For a full minute he swung in the grasp of the Evil One; then, as a pea is popped from its shell by a rude hand, the sheath of his fear flew apart and he stood forth, once again the well-poised man, quite sure of his place and need in the world, but in the brief moment of fear the bubble of his fancy had been shattered.

On the lower deck he found his favorite span, which had been sent to meet him in Vancouver, fast asleep as if rocked in a gigantic cradle. Beside them, the huge Newfoundland, for which Pauline had expressed a wish, was stretching and yawning at his new master's approach. As the animal rubbed its great jowl against his sleeve, Walcott was pleased, for he still felt shaken and uneasy.

"Good for you, old chap, you're glad to see me, aren't you? You ought to be big enough to keep the bugaboos from troubling me," Walcott crooned, leaning against a piano case standing with the freight bound for Tacoma. As his shoulder rubbed to and fro with the motion of the boat, he became conscious of

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a numbness which swept over him with an exquisite fineness of torture, as different from the preceding sensation as extracting a quivering nerve at the point of a needle is different from the blow of a sledge.

Impatient, Walcott took out his knife and began to whittle the case, while his thoughts bounded away to handsome Pauline, awaiting his coming well-laden with rare gifts for her from the Orient. He was amazed to find himself doubting the sincerity of her greeting. Scarce half an hour before he had been chafing at the regular thud, thud, of the engines, wishing them to race with the longings of his heart. Ashamed of his awakening, yet strangely glad, he conjured up the picture as he saw her last, in a passion-red gown, her head a little bent, eyes narrowed to ferret out the double meaning she suspected to lurk beneath each word and action,— and she hardly twenty-one!

He shrugged his shoulders at thought of her mother — twice divorced — entertaining a prospective third — or was it only a persistent bill-collector, in the gloom of the best parlor? Gloomy best rooms are a boon to such housekeepers as she — the cleaning-woman's wages so much better expended in things bottled! Barely thirty, Walcott was aghast to find his easy tolerance changed to cynicism in an hour.

He had scarcely resumed his whittling, when his knife slipped into a crack and wedged there. Throwing the weight of his wrist against it, the board unexpectedly slid beneath its fellow, disclosing an opening! As Walcott stood, uncertain of his discovery, a premonition of good stole over him and he knew that his revulsion had been the effect of a mysterious influence, very near. Lowering his ear, soft, startled breathing came with the force of pounding to his wrought-up nerves, while, with pauses for courage to encounter the unknown, he slowly inserted his hand. He almost yelled when it was clutched by soft, clinging fingers steeled to strength by anxiety. Touched by pity, Walcott pressed the hand reassuringly as he drew it forth into the dim light. Small, slender, beautifully formed, it was undoubtedly feminine, and doubtless Oriental!

Gently freeing himself from the supplicating fingers, he had scarce time to snap the panel into place with a hiss of warning

when a lantern was swung along the aisle by a member of the crew on a final tour of inspection — running daily from a foreign port is a big responsibility.

The fellow eyed Walcott a bit suspiciously, but when Walcott waved his hand toward the dog and horses he grunted amicably and ambled on, amused that a man's love for a dumb brute or two could keep him out of a comfortable bed and cabin at this hour of the night.

Walcott stood where the man had left him, thinking, thinking! Whatever was to be done must be planned and executed quickly, before the early dawn crept up to swallow the earth. Making his way to the sliding door opening on the guards, he was refreshed by a few gulps of salt air.

A frail girl, stolen from her far away home, was dependent on him for freedom from slavery. His duty was to inform the custom authorities on board, in which event she would be deported on one of the China liners, to meet a fate perhaps scarce better. The taste of this was bitter to his chivalrous tongue.

Walcott started, as Pilot, the big dog, thrust his moist nose against his palm. Bending down to caress him, he both groaned and sighed as a saving idea rushed into his brain. With unsteady hands he unfastened the chain and slipped his fingers under the broad silver-studded collar, shuddering as he felt the great muscles of the shaggy neck swell with pleasure at his touch.

He led the dog along the guards until well astern where, during the dark hours there was little chance of discovery, while overhead the moon, clipped into a double-pointed macheté, seemed thrusting a sinister point at him. Beneath his feet the water ran green and oily.

The noble, big-hearted dog lifted his eyes to his master's anguished face, licking his hand reassuringly, thus exposing his own broad, silky breast. Swallowing a groan, Walcott's muscles suddenly grew rigid and his right hand shot out, armed with a belaying-pin, which he brought down with crushing force on the great head raised so trustingly. Without a groan Pilot sank heavily on the guard. Every trace of reluctance now gone, Walcott whipped off his coat and fell to work feverishly, taking off

the great shaggy skin as bloodlessly as possible, the flayed body finding resting-place at the bottom of the Sound.

When the cool daylight came, Pilot lay as if sleeping, in the back of the trap to which the two shining bays were harnessed, pawing impatiently to be ashore. Walcott paced the deck restlessly, his hand-baggage lying open beside the trap for the dread visit of the customs officers. At every sound his heart contracted, only to thump violently at each release of tension. When at last the officers loomed near, Walcott all at once grew quite cool, smiling a little grimly when a small, wiry man accosted him:

"Glad to see you back, Mr. Walcott. Knew you must be expected soon when your rig was sent up last week." Turning to his companion officer he said, "Never mind this gentleman's outfit, he's all right. Yes, thank you, we might smoke." Helping themselves liberally, they passed on with good-humored importance, a scrap of conversation drifting back which Walcott overheard smilingly: "Fine young blood, that. Father left him a big stack of rocks."

By a generous tip to the mate, Walcott was allowed an early exit ashore, which he made by a skilful turn up the gang-plank. One of the crew, laying a helping hand on the back of the trap, snatched it away with a snort of fear as he touched Pilot's fur, amid a roar of derision from his mates. Walcott flushed, but regained his composure in an instant, and was soon speeding his thoroughbreds through the town toward the beautiful home where he lived with his two sisters.

When he drove into the stable, the colored boy there was arrested in his expressions of delight at his master's sudden appearance, by a command to go to Walcott's office at once for important mail.

With the first sigh of relief he had allowed himself, he closed and locked the door after the boy, before rushing to the trap to lift the heavy dog pelt with the girl safe inside and to carry both to a dark corner in the loft. Then he hurried into the house, interrupting his sisters' joyful greetings to enlist their ready sympathy.

After a refreshing bath and a good breakfast he sallied forth, his steps leading him toward the home of dark-eyed, red-cheeked

Pauline. On the steps to the apartment he met Chad Philips, a friend, whose flush of confusion and embarrassment scarcely aroused a tremor of amusement in Walcott. The girl was not in the least disconcerted, greeting him easily, her poppy-colored gown not throwing so seductive a light about her as of old.

Walcott began to apologize for not bringing her the dog, voicing a glib excuse about sudden sickness and death, she watching him the while, from her pose on the green-cushioned divan. He guiltily imagined he detected cunning in her glance, but whipped the thought aside as unworthy, before she spoke.

"Wasn't his death most unusual?" she asked innocently, scarcely moving her rich, red lips.

"Yes, rather —," he began, when she interrupted him with a peal of mirthless laughter, as she said:

"Oh, I was expecting you, though Chad knew nothing about it. It was strange, wasn't it? — but Mrs. Tuttle happened to be on the dock and I was sure she told me she saw your dog frighten one of the crew. Odd for a dead dog to do that, but of course I should never dream of doubting your word."

For a wonder Walcott's face did not redden. He returned the girl's gaze by one quite as cool, though somewhere about his toes a great anger and scorn began to ferment and to gradually mount along his legs and body until it climbed into his brain and sat paramount. As he got on to his feet, Walcott controlled the anger and his voice to say courteously, "I am very sorry, but the dog Mrs. Tuttle saw *was* dead; however, to prove to you my good faith I shall send you the poor fellow's pelt, Miss Gore." Formerly "Pauline" had seemed too cold, but to-day there was bitter frost on his tongue.

He was as good as his word. In less than an hour a large package arrived which, to Pauline's horror, contained the superb coat of a huge Newfoundland. She screamed— then her eyes blazed — and henceforth her face grew blank with unrecognition when Walcott's figure loomed in the distance.

He strode out of the house in an ugly mood. This was his first row with a woman, and he was disgusted with himself, as well as with Pauline.

At his own door he was met by his sisters. "Oh, brother,"

one began eagerly, "You must see how perfectly charming — really, we never saw any one so exquisitely beautiful." Chatting gaily, they hurried him through the hall and up the stairs to a door which they opened softly, pushing him inside and closing the door behind him.

The soft light of the sun flowed through half-shaded windows in a diffused glow, soothing and delightful to his ruffled senses. A movement by one of the windows made him turn, as a little, quaint figure rose from the floor and stood with bowed head and drooping arms before him, the soft color fluttering in her oval cheeks and her slender fingers clutching the handsome brocade of her rich Oriental dress.

Overcome by her beauty Walcott made a movement to seize her hands. In spite of her gratitude to her deliverer, she was alarmed at the approach of a man, and a foreigner as well, and, gliding back, she stretched out a hand on each side, with a pathetic attempt to protect herself. Then, sinking on to the floor, she bowed until her forehead touched the rug, in honor and submission. After a long silence, she raised her head and lifted her soft, dark eyes to his, hiding them again in confusion at sight of his absorbed face, while a tender smile flitted over her lips.

At this juncture Walcott's frightened sisters burst in on him: "We put Mary to watch, and she says some officers are at the door!" gasped Ruth. Ethel was across the room and had pulled the heavy drawer of a massive wardrobe out on the floor before Walcott could collect his wits. After helping the cowering girl into the orifice thus exposed, Ethel hastily explained:

"While you were gone this morning, Hunt, I had good old Seth cut a great slice off the back of the drawer, so there is plenty of room for her to hide in."

As Ethel tucked in a trailing fragment of the beautiful brocade, Walcott lifted the drawer and slipped it into the wardrobe. When he rose to his feet he was amazed to see his sisters seated in low chairs by the window cosily sewing and gossiping together. Trying to assume a calmness he did not feel, Walcott strolled into the hall toward the sound of approaching footsteps, meeting the officers as they reached the head of the stairs.

"We are sorry to bother you, sir," the spokesman began,

apologetically, "But a high-born Chinese girl, who was being smuggled into this country to be married to a rich merchant she had never heard of, got away last night on the boat you came down on. The men who stole her in China were under heavy bond, it seems, to this merchant, for her safe delivery. In case of detection they expected the government to deport her and they would have the chance to try again. The way you are concerned is that you were seen near the case she escaped from at a late hour last night; so I have orders, sir, to search the house."

Walcott hastened to extend his sisters' and his own permission for a thorough search, and the leader despatched his men to the several floors, he himself lingering to say, in a confidential tone: "Between you and me, sir, I believe that girl is in the bottom of the Sound — there was fresh blood found on the guards this morning! These Chinamen are up to many tricks." With these words he joined his men, leaving Walcott to descend the stair, where he found the front door guarded by a husky patrolman.

A drizzling rain had set in and Walcott stood by a window, looking out on the world of mist, his brain whirling under the stress of suspense, every nerve alert for the dreadful moment of discovery.

A touch on his arm sent the spectre of prison-bars gaping into his face. A quiet voice said, "It is my duty, you know, Mr. Walcott." Walcott's face went gray, and he staggered, as the man went on, "I must obey orders, but I hope we have not disturbed your first day at home very much."

Whirling, Walcott presented a radiant face to the man, whose hand he gave a hearty shake. "I hope you will have better success next time," he said, laughingly, bowing the men out of the house with his most gracious manner.

With heart bounding and the blood running in a riotous flame over him, he heard his sisters on the stairs and turned to meet their happy faces, his whole being again quivering, but this time it was not with fear, not with doubt, for in his heart had blossomed the sweetest thought that is given man to enjoy.